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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

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VOL. 6 NO. 20
SECOND ISSUE OF
NOVEMBER 1976
Issue #142

- SHAKEDOWN CRUISE OF THE "EL CAMINO"
- AMTRAK'S BI-LEVEL "SIGHTSEER" LOUNGE CAR

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ON THE COVER:

The San Diego Amtrak station on Nov 17. In the foreground is Los Angeles County observation "San Fernando" (ex-"Silver Planet") on the rear of the county's EL CAMINO train, on its shakedown run--reported on by Peter Bretz starting on page 9. On the track behind it is Amtrak F40PH engine no. 222 which has just brought in SAN DIEGAN train 772. Color transparency by Peter Bretz.

CARS & CONSISTS

Some Thanksgiving holiday consists--

*BROADWAY LIMITED, train 40, Trenton NJ, Nov 25: engine 903 (GG-1); cars 1053, 2006, 2024, 5250, 5256, 5400, 5409, 3402, 8802, 8803, 3206, 2402, 2559 (has extra slumbercoach and sleeper).

*SILVER STAR, train 81, Trenton NJ Nov 25: engines 920, 906 (GG-1s); cars 1429, 2785, 3220, 4418, 4451, 4583, 4466, 4596, 3410, 8002, 3312, 4420, 5645, 4450, 4406, 4436, 2638. Same, Alexandria VA Nov 20: engines 641, 636; cars 1000 (Boston-Miami mail), 1428, 2781, 3225, 4592, 4565, 4560, 4582, 4584, 3407, 8006 (Miami section); 4571, 4446, 4593, 4564, 4445, 2701 (St. Pete section). (Galley lounge bad-ordered in N.Y.). Train 82, same: engines 549, 610, 640; cars 1191 (Boston-Miami mail), 1429, 2785, 3220, 4418, 4451, 4583, 4466, 4596, 3410, 8002 (Miami section); 3327, 4420, 4574, 4590, 4459, 4415 (St. Pete section; St. Pete sleeper absent).

*CHAMPION, train 88, Trenton NJ Nov 25: engine 955 (E60); cars 1180, 1406, 4452, 4463, 4439, 8010, 3310, 5460, 5477, 4589, 4595, 2030, 8007, 3208, 2310, 2602, 2778, 2796.

*LAKE SHORE LIMITED, train 48, Elyria OH, Nov 23: engines 593, 588; cars 1530, 2029, 2003, 2831, 2382, 8334, 3362, 5652, 5802, 5618, 5614, 5805, 5662, 5653, 2531. Same, Nov 24: engines 596, 606; cars 1532, 2026, 2817, 2305, 8336, 3360, 5664, 5669, 5433, 5640, 5623, 5672, 2530. Train 49, NYC, Nov 20: engines PC238, PC236 (FL9s); cars 1531, 2021, 2833, 8339, 3250, 5649, 5656, 3970, 6408, 6087 (at Croton-Harmon, engines changed to 447, 443 (E8s), 416 (E9). Train 449, Albany NY, Nov 20: engines 444, 292 (E8s); cars 3630, 5679, 5641, 2533.

*COAST STARLIGHT, train 11, San Jose, Nov 24: engines 567, 556; cars 1031, 1501, 4544, 4499, 4452, 4495, 8102, 4543, 4542, 4860, 4868, 5235, 4462, dome 9370, 8038, 2420, 2729, 2365.

*JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY/MOUNTAINEER, train 50-54, Marion IN, Nov 23: engines 639, 547 (SDP40Fs), 400 (E9a); cars 1064, 1602, 2704, 5685, 5646, 6800, 5475, 5678, 6024, 8400, dome 9540, 5469, 2152.

*Combined SOUTHWEST LIMITED/LONE STAR, train 4-16, Chicago, Nov 21: engines 528, 616; cars 1029, 9994, 9912, 9931, 9974, 9984, 9927, 2216, dome 9355, 2758, 2751.

*PALMETTO, train 89, Alexandria VA, Nov 20: engine 707 (P30); cars Ambag 1375, Amclub 20113, Amcoach 21833, Amlounge 20751, Amcoaches 21815, 21809, 21081.

*SHENANDOAH, train 33, Silver Spring MD, Nov 21: engine 715 (P30); cars Amlounge 20207, Amcoach 21846.

MONTREALER, train 61, Capital Beltway MD, Nov 21: engine 911 (GG-1 in black); cars 1512, 2101, 2017, 8338, 3301, 5239, 6029, 6030, 6023, (added in NY:) ConRail 1589, 6075, 1192. *First car repainted by Amtrak in 1971 for display purposes.

*INTER-AMERICAN, train 21, Little Rock, Oct 29 (deadheading equip't south for beginning of daily service on Oct 31): engines 424, 433, 421, 440 (Es); d.h. cars 1358, 1750, 2236, 8111, 4844, 4421; cars 1411, 2680, 8322, 4845, 4846.

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STAFF: Editor: James Russell. Editor-at-Large: Paul Rayton. Regional Correspondents: Peter Putnam Bretz, Los Angeles; Jack Ferry, Chicago; Kenneth Maylath, Baltimore; Peter Roehm, Boston.

IN THIS ISSUE:

We have two first reports of special interest this issue: Peter Bretz's description of a first ride on the planned EL CAMINO service between Los Angeles and San Diego; and a pictorial introduction to Amtrak's new bi-level Sightseer lounge car. We also bring you the final installment of reader comments from our third survey. If there seem to be a lot of negative comments, remember that we've worked our way to the bottom of the barrel, covering those long-distance trains rated the lowest.

ANOTHER DERAILMENT OF THE PANAMA LIMITED

Amtrak train 59, the southbound PANAMA LIMITED, derailed about a mile north of Dyersburg TN in the early hours of Thanksgiving Day, Nov 25. The train reportedly hit a kink in the track which the engineer saw but could not avoid, and altho the cars of the train scattered themselves like Pick-Up Sticks across the track (two cars straddling the track at right angles to it), there were no serious injuries, and only 30 of the 250 people aboard were treated for minor injuries.

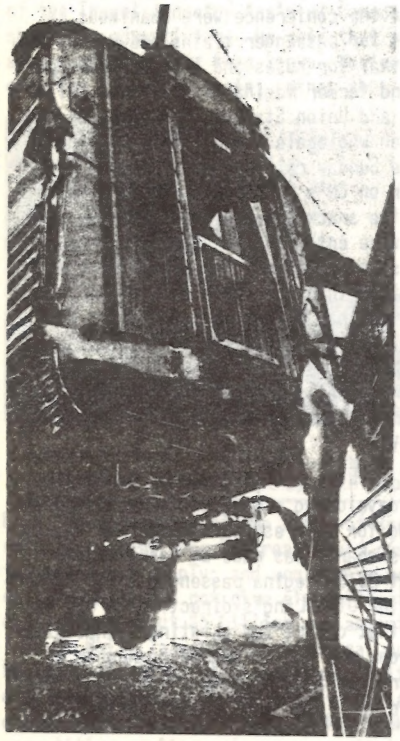


Photo by Barney Sellers, courtesy of The Commercial Appeal (Memphis).

The damage to the track which caused the derailment reportedly happened only minutes before, when a late-model American automobile with two young men struck the track after missing a curve, at the intersection of Phillips Extended and Sylvin Road. Douglas Reasons, 20, was reported charged by police with failure to maintain control of his car and leaving the scene of an accident. One report suggested the driver of the offending car had been drinking. Amtrak said it would consider pressing charges against the driver.

The train consisted of 3 engines and 12 cars. The engines did not derail, and conflicting reports said that all the cars derailed, or all but the last two cars. The train consist was as follows: engines 582 (SDP40F), 417 (E9A), 332 (E8A); cars 1917 (steam generator car?), baggage 1169, dome sleeper 9201 "Starlight Dome", 10/6 sleeper 2836 "Missouri Valley", diner 8099, coaches 5615, 5631, and 5455, snack-bar coach 3926, coaches 4845 and 5804, and tavern lounge observation 3344. While some of the cars tilted, none overturned. The train was traveling at about 30mph at the time of the accident, slowing for the Dyersburg station stop. Train 58 was turned in Memphis and run to New Orleans as no. 59, while the next train 59 turned at Fulton and ran to Chicago as no. 58, with passengers bused between the two points. The most recent derailments of the PANAMA occurred on September 9 and June 30.

THE TRAIN FROM PLAINS RUNS MAINLY ON THE MAIN

Residents of Plains GA, home of president-elect Jimmy Carter, are arranging with Amtrak to run an overnight train from that town to Washington for the Carter inaugural on Jan 20. One plan called for 15 sleepers, two diners and a lounge. Amtrak said plans were not finalized, but the equipment would probably be moved from New Orleans. Plains is on an SCL freight-only line. Route would be Plains-Cordele-Waycroft-Savannah to SILVER METEOR line.

Rail Canada

NATIONAL RAIL PASSENGER Conference held in Regina Oct 29-31 showed a promising future for passenger trains both locally nationally, according to the Saskatchewan Rail Committee, co-sponsor of the conference with the University of Regina.

Michael Jackson, chairman of the rail committee, a provincial citizens' group pressing for better train service, said the conference results far exceeded all expectations. "Nearly 7000 people visited the demonstration VIA train displayed by CN and CP at Regina Union Station, which is about 5% of the population of Regina," he said. "This is a remarkable result and shows there is real interest among local people for improved passenger trains. The citizens of Regina rediscovered their railway station." He added that the conference might possibly influence Regina's rail relocation plans: "The experts present at the conference were unanimous in recommending retention of downtown rail access for passenger trains and use of Union Station as a combined transportation terminal for buses and trains." Joseph Skvaril, an internationally-known architect and former Regina city planner, displayed designs incorporating the CP main line and Union Station in a plan which he said would be more beneficial for the city than wholesale removal of rail lines.

Another success, said the committee, was the Sunday railiner excursion to Fort Qu'Appelle and Melville--first passenger train on CN's Qu'Appelle subdivision in 15 years. A capacity crowd of 80 was aboard the snack bar-equipped railiner, and they and the people in the local communities were enthusiastic about the idea of restoring regular train service. "The line is in excellent shape, with smooth welded rail, and even higher speeds seem possible than the 70mph we were allowed" Mr. Jackson said, "which backs up our contention that a regular railiner to Melville and Yorkton would be feasible, especially if it were operated in close cooperation with STC buses."

A digest of the conference proceedings will be available from the Univ. of Regina's Extension Dept. early in 1977, reports the consumer organization Transport 2000 (Box 300, Terminal A, Ottawa, Ont. K1N 8V3).

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS ATTACK CANADIAN PASSENGER MOVES by Angus M. M. Dundee

The Canadian Federal transport minister is developing a program for revising the Canadian transportation policy without waiting for the results of hearings on passenger trains held this year by the CTC. This charge was made by Saskatchewan transport minister Gordon MacMurchy at the Oct 29-31 Regina passenger train conference. MacMurchy said federal transport minister Otto Lang's directive to CTC to design a single, viable rail network implies that one of the existing transcontinental passenger runs must be removed. MacMurchy was one of a growing number of officials to defend the transcon passenger services against suggestions that "user pay" policies must be applied. MacMurchy said the "user pay" policy denies national, regional and social goals.

Lloyd Axworthy, urban planner and member of the Manitoba legislature, told conference delegates that those advocating increased passenger service on the prairies should first consider the kind of society that they wish to build, and how rail travel would fit into such a society. Axworthy said such an approach would give train supporters a more logical approach in their attempts to convince Lang to increase rail service.

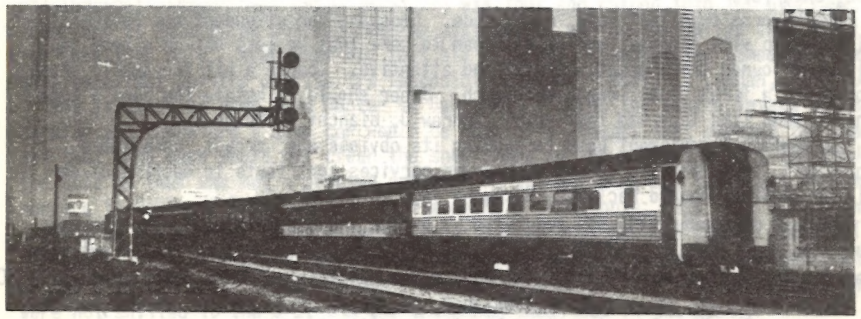
"Mr. Lang's advisers have propellors for brains," charged George McDevitt, vice-president of the UTU. He claimed that the federal transport ministry is obsessed with air transportation. Lang, however, said: "I think it is counter-productive to maintain that my department is mainly airplane-minded." Lang asked critics to work with him to develop a passenger train system that made economic sense, and repeated his call for "user pay" funding strategies. Lang said that while Canadians do have a fundamental right to good passenger train service, they do not have a right to subsidized service if that service is not used.

Russell Steele, Saskatchewan area manager for CN, said that if railways were able to increase their market share from 5% to 10% they would be able to fill all passenger equipment currently available. He said improved facilities would help railways increase patronage on shorter runs.

A legislative director for the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers, Jack Wynter, said that nationalization of CP Rail would be a major step toward formation of an efficient rail service in Canada.

A CP Rail passenger official who said that 70% of railway tourist traffic takes place in the June-Sept season, told a panel group that CP had discontinued efforts to obtain tourist traffic because advertising costs did not produce proportionate increases in passenger traffic. One report recently indicated that CP Rail's advertising budget was about $40,000 per year.

Pacific Western Airlines vice-president David Jacox, who also serves as an officer of the Travel Industry Ass'n of Canada, said that the railways must utilize steamship type advertising. He said that ships are recognized as "destinations" in such advertising, rather than travel devices; and that railways must stress the "experience" of travel by train, rather than simply as a way to move from point to point.



Canadian National's NORTHLAND, now up for discontinuance, pulls into Toronto on a slow Saturday morning (Oct 2) with a baggage and 4 passenger cars. Fred Matthews.

Prof. Fred Anderson of the Univ. of Regina economics Dept. said electrification of main lines west from Montreal would cost less than plants to develop the Athabasca tar sands oil supply; and would save more oil than the tar-sands plants would develop. Anderson did not give electrification costs or oil-volume savings, but did indicate that about $5 billion was anticipated in tar-sands investment.

W. B. White, a senior CN technical advisor, said electrification of railways might be impractical, as major portions of line would have to be converted from diesel to electric operation at one time. Such a switch would be more difficult than the change from steam to diesel, which took place gradually, White said. He said the competitive position of passenger trains depends on speed; and that limits up to 120 or 140mph would require many more grade crossing safety measures than now used.

THE "PRINCESS MARGUERITE" will continue its Seattle-Victoria runs for at least another year, came the announcement in late Nov. A letter-writing campaign was believed partially responsible for the favorable decision by B.C. officials.

PROPOSED RAIL LINE linking the Fraser River Canyon lines of CP Rail and CN with B.C. Railway is being reassessed again, with a report due by Christmas. The 40-mile route would start at Ashcroft on the Fraser, and join the B.C. Rwy at Clinton, giving a bypass to Fraser River lines often closed by slides in winter.

CP RAIL IS appealing to the Canadian federal cabinet a CTC order that CP must rebuild two bridges on its Vancouver Island E&N subsidiary line at Parksville. The route was closed in 1975 when CP declared the bridges unsafe, and passenger service by the E&N RDC car was halted north of Parksville. CP calimed the $2 million expenditure was not justified. The CTC found CP had willfully allowed the bridges to deteriorate as a prelude to discontinuance.

TRAIN RIDERS SPEAK OUT

COMMENTS FROM RTN'S THIRD READER TRAIN RATING SURVEY

SILVER STAR

"Train was rated very good--had very few problems with heat or air conditioning, which I consider very good for a train which sees both extremes of weather. Dining car crew was most efficient, and the food excellent, with prices to match. The equipment, except for the ex-Army hospital car Pub, was well-suited for the train. The Pub was small for the crowd using it, and it suffered from lack of air conditioning and lights. A well-run train" (William D. Sample, E. Hartford CT).

"Still a good train, altho it has worsened in recent years. First class service has been ruined by the removal of the sleeper lounge and the placement of sleepers so that access to diners and lounge is almost impossible. Dining car crew needs to be more efficient in handling crowds and stocking the car" (Duane W. Roller, Waterloo, Ontario).

"Track worse than last year; rough ride. Sleeping car attendant not "with it"--didn't help with luggage, and didn't seem to care that he lost out on a good tip. Dining & lounge crews great, helpful and attentive. Lounge a bit too small; train could use a first class lounge very much. Diner should reinstate the Surf & Turf on the menu like they had last year" (Andrew J. Bianchi, Chicago IL).

"Conventional equipment used is showing its obvious age; crowds, unreliable equipment, and attention focussed on newer services contribute to decline of employee morale" (Donald MacInnes, Richmond VA).

"Biggest disappointment was smart-alecky waiter and unmotivated lounge steward; but excellent sleeping car porter with amiable conductor. Porter pointed out sites. Bedroom in "Sumter County" shabby already altho refurbished" (Joe Busby, Rock Hill SC).

"Rubber mattress and rubber pillows--hot, no sleep. Rain came in window, so hall floor was wet. No cold water at sink. Air conditioning knob not working. No knob on temperature control" (William Stroh III, Short Hills NJ).

"Particularly impressed by the 30th St. Philadelphia Amtrak manager who supervised loading of the train, who used his radio to obtain car and seat numbers missing from our ticket. Track was generally in good repair in the Corridor, but we hit several rough spots which caused cream pitchers and beverages to spill in the diner. Steward and waiter were very helpful in moving us to more central table after the second spill" (James W. Hofmeister, Houston TX).

SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR

"A rolling bad order. That includes equipment and crew. Needs domes back" (Roy Gabriel, Sacramento CA).

"BN crew was along for the ride. No diner! GN Ranch car substituted--no hot food" (Dennis C. Henry, Freeport IL).

"Train is a disappointment with no dome on the Denver-Oakland leg. Many people in Western Nebraska don't even know Amtrak exists. As far as they know when they lost their passenger trains April 30, 1971, they stopped. Amtrak has done a terrible publicity job in this area. The ZEPHYR is a good product which has not been sold as it should and could be" (Lawrence C. Gibbs, Gering NE).

"Arrived Ogden 4½ hrs late; remained same to Oakland. No porter at door of car 531 at 3am to greet me; told me later he was "off-duty." Car 531 ran hot all the way; no fan either. Lounge car turned hot in California. Diner hot, very hot ALL the way. So hot I had to take my food and run to lounge. Dining car steward very uptight; waiter very good. Only cold sandwiches on menu. Lounge attendant served drinks only--food had run out--served grudgingly. What can I say?" (J. T. O'Connor, Sea Cliff NY).

"Diner electricity failed just out of Chicago. Some dinners served despite heavy smoke and heat in car. Breakfast delayed next morning so tours on board could be fed. Power also failed in two sleepers. Electricity not repaired until Lincoln, 9 hours after failure" (Kenneth Lang, Malden MO).

"Westbound train came a few hours late. Only 7 cars long. Overbooked--had to stand. Fictitious car number on ticket. No dome car. Long line at diner; I gave up" (James O'Quinn, Paso Robles CA).

"Arrived in Chicago 9 hours late due to freight derailment east of Omaha. Needs a dome between Oakland and Denver. Dining car crew overworked and negative. Second diner needed east of Denver" (M. G. Carlson, Harwood Heights IL).

"It is a shame that Amtrak cuts off the dome cars in Denver when the best scenery comes west of that city" (Erling D. Benson, Lubbock TX).

"No lounge car of any type this trip. Congestion in diner intolerable. Crew performed reasonably well. Presence of Amtrak superviser contained potentially surly diner crew" (Andrew M. Spieker, Menlo Park CA).

"I saw Pullman porter only upon departure from train at Oakland; he did not carry off luggage! Stewart was rated zero! He was foul and ruined trip for everyone. Rumor had it that #5 is not his regular assignment, and he was pulled into service for this trip only. Wish they had left him at home! Young waiter named Williams gave excellent service despite his impossible steward" (David L. Langan, Tulsa OK).

"Why is there no dome from Denver to Oakland? I think the Sierra Nevada are spectacular and therefore a dome car would be great. I thought that perhaps the reason was that such cars would not clear the snow sheds in the mountains, but the conductor told me that was not a problem and that he was not sure why there was no dome service to Oakland" (James Russo, Baltimore MD). (Ed. note: Late last spring the ex-SP dome loungesused Oakland-Denver were shopped and then shifted to the COAST STARLIGHT. The only other Amtrak domes that will meet SP's clearance requirements in the Sierra are the three low-profile ex-B&O domes, but for reasons unknown these were not shifted to the SFZ, tho the train had used them in the past.)

SUNSET LIMITED

"This train has improved since my last trip, especially in the efficient handling of the dining car and the quality of the equipment. But the track between San Antonio and Lake Charles has deteriorated so badly that it is not possible to make the time" (Duane W. Roller, Waterloo, Ontario).

"Train was a pleasant surprise. It was clean, the equipment was in good condition, and the crew was good. We lost time in Texas and arrived in New Orleans quite late (a normal situation, we were told). It was another full load!" (Intis Vanags, San Ramon CA).

"This was surprisingly the finest train on our trip. The hi-level equipment is superb, and service in the dining and lounge cars was the best we had seen. The on-board attendants and trainmen were all courteous and friendly. My only complaint was that only Budweiser and Schlitz beers are available, which is typical on Amtrak's Western trains. The availability of ale and regional beers on the Corridor trains was a touch of class which should be implemented on all trains... Train ran fine thru Louisiana, but crawled from the Texas border to Beaumont and then got stopped for a long freight just east of Houston, making it 20mins late coming in, the only train that wasn't on time of the eight we took" (Perry Huntoon, Houston TX).

"Best long distance train running in Amtrak system" (K. R. White, Memphis TN).

"Sleeping car porter turned out to be the most efficient and courteous one of the whole trip... Why no dome car on the SUNSET?" (James Russo, Baltimore MD). (Ed. note: Dome observations appeared this fall.)

"One of train's big problems is lack of daily operation. Altho arrival and departure times are generally convenient, it seems like it's never running the day you want to go. Also the eastbound train is consistently late on the eastern end of the run" (Jeff Pletcher, Lafayette LA).

"Would have been rated higher had we not had a couple of unfortunate incidents, including hitting a cement mixer, killing the driver, at Columbia TX. Dining car steward was a mean one. If something went wrong, he held an ugly grudge thru the end of the trip" (Frederic Hirsch, New York NY).

"SP is still not cooperating. We were 2hrs late most of the way on a well-padded schedule (L.A.-San Antonio). Something should be done about SP's 70mph speed limit" (Stephen Miller, Carlsbad CA).

"After the Southern, it was good to be back on Amtrak. We felt somewhat alien on the Southern, but Amtrak was like coming home. Overnight accommodations on the train in New Orleans were quite comfortable, but a thru train on a daily schedule would be preferable" (James W. Hofmeister, Houston TX).

LAKE SHORE LIMITED

"This seems to be a priority train without being labeled as such. The equipment is good, the route is scenic and historic, the crew was delightful. The Toledo station is the best, anywhere, that I have seen. The train had enough positive points that I could tolerate the lack of lights, heat, and water" (Chas. Landey, Detroit MI).

"I like this train much more than the BROADWAY LIMITED. The scenery is much nicer and the crew is more pleasant. There are only three faults: (1) scheduling is bad in and out of Chicago, (2) a diner-lounge is needed from Chicago-Cleveland; the parlor car is jammed leaving Chicago, and (3) train makes awful time" (Danny Vaccaro, Great

"Quality of service varies enormously from one trip to the next, thus making a single numerical rating of on-board service almost meaningless. Still, sometimes it is very good indeed" (Mike Morrison, Chicago IL).

"Train was over an hour late in Springfield, and well over 4hrs late into Chicago. One inconceivable act of thoughtlessness by Amtrak occurred as we pulled into Chicago: the train had quite a few passengers connecting with the SOUTHWEST LIMITED; just as we were pulling into the station, the SOUTHWEST was pulling out. The outrage was heard throughout the train, and Amtrak lost plenty of supporters. The train was O.K., but needs more upgraded equipment. Schedule is too slow and makes for poor connections" (Intis Vanags, San Ramon CA).

"Train has improved since my last trip. The addition of a full diner and separate lounge certainly helps, altho I would prefer a real lounge instead of the parlor car normally used. My worst complaint was the dining and lounge car crew, who were surly, sloppy and very slow. One waiter even forgot what tables he was serving, and served the orders to the wrong patrons" (Rolf H. Schneider, Falls Village CT).

"Train held 15mins at Chicago for connecting passengers from SOUTHWEST LIMITED. "Early Bird" dinner started at 4pm EDT--a full meal for $3.25, including tax, with a choice of ground beef or turkey, and drinks. Regular dinner (same wide selection as on SOUTHWEST LIMITED) from 5:15 till after 9pm. Eleven cars, well-patronized, but conductor said over 400 used train the previous day. No-smoking rule enforced in diner--Good!" (John Kramer, W. Henrietta NY).

"Food service car on the Boston section is well-designed for a one-man operation. Attendant not one of the best. He seemed to think that passengers should be clearing the tables. Conductor was friendly; he assured me that even tho we were 2½hrs late at Albany, we would not be very late into Boston. He was right--we were about 10mins late... Engineer really knew his job; he was able to make up time without giving us a rough ride and this is not easy on the curves and grades of the old Boston & Albany RR. This would seem to prove that there is quite a bit of padding in the schedule. The Amtrak station at Worcester is small and functional, but Worcester's grand old Union Station is still standing in a sad state of neglect. It is a wonderful example of railroad architecture and is worthy of preservation and rehabilitation" (William McCaffrey, Cambridge MA).

"Low clearances are now removed; dome cars could run Chicago to Boston (tho not into New York City), according to ConRail" (Robert G. Wickens, Elyria OH).

(continued on page 14)

SHAKEDOWN CRUISE OF THE "EL CAMINO"

by Peter Putnam Bretz

It's eight in the morning on a hot November 17 at Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal. The last stragglers are just coming off the SUNSET LIMITED, and a couple of Amfleet trains are sitting nearby, the consists for the 8:30 and 10:30am SAN DIEGANS. Here at track five, I stand next to a set of conventional equipment. For some months now, various coaches of the Los Angeles County's unborn but very pregnant "commuter" operation to San Diego have been sitting around the LAUPT tracks. Today, however, seven of the cars are hooked together, and lo and behold, an Amtrak diesel heads 'em up! An Amtrak Special will get underway this morning--a shakedown cruise of L.A. County Supervisor Baxter Ward's EL CAMINO. Let's look at the equipment from the outside:

509 Amtrak SDP40F engine
LA104 "Santa Monica" coach-lounge, ex-Illinois Central 2627, Pullman-Standard 1947
LA103 "La Mirada" coach-lounge, ex-Illinois Central 2621, Pullman-Standard 1947
LA101 "Sierra Madre" coach-lounge, ex-C&EI 463 "Vermilion Trail", P-S 1948
LA102 "Crescenta Valley" coach-lounge, ex-IC 2600, P-S 1940
LA106 "Palos Verdes" buffet-lounge, ex-Milwaukee Tap-lounge 172, built 1948
LA105 "Los Angeles" coach-lounge, ex-IC 2632, P-S 1947
LA108 "San Fernando" dome-lounge-observation, ex-WP "Silver Planet" (ex-CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR), Budd 1948.

Besides these cars, the County owns LA107 "Montebello", another buffet-lounge (ex-Milwaukee Tap-lounge 173). The cars have standard Amtrak red, white and blue against a Platinum Mist Metallic (glows in the dark) body color, with a red stripe running along the bottom edge--a very pleasing effect. Each car's name is in very large, bold blue letters in the traditional location below the window line. And next to each vestibule door a small decal denotes "EL CAMINO SERVICE." It's a stylized representation of the Los Angeles sunset, the same logo that would have been used on the Sunset Coast Line rapid transit that was voted down last June. The drumhead on the rear of the observation car also sports this logo. Because of the large names on the sides, the equipment is instantly recognized as non-Amtrak, altho the NRPC is to operate the train.

I'm admiring this apparition when the 8:30 SAN DIEGAN "dings" out of the station. Ten minutes later, a cleaning crew arrives and wipes the dust from the car interiors. Amtrak is a little slow on this, as they knew about today's run weeks ago. A cleaning lady, pressing her cloth, bulges out a lounge window. Uh oh, I thought, Lexan. Every window in the observation car, including the dome, checked out as single-pane Lexan. But clear and shiny.

I spot some officials floating around the platform, including some Amtrak people I recognize. Many board the train to have a look, but only a handful stay aboard. I get on the rear car and settle in an observation seat. The solarium section has four individual parlor-type seats on one side and five on the other side of the aisle, the extra one where the writing desk used to be. They all face the rear, but don't swivel.

A pickup truck arrives on the platform with tanks of propane to fuel the Waukesha air-conditioning units on the ex-IC and Milwaukee cars. Just fueling up now? Another laxity. In fact, not all tanks are placed on the train.

We were to leave at 9am, but it's 9:22 when we finally glide out of the station. We're going to San Diego to check out the operation of the train, coordinate some things, and see if the equipment can make the schedule. "Baxter Ward's Choo Choo," as it's called locally, is off and running.

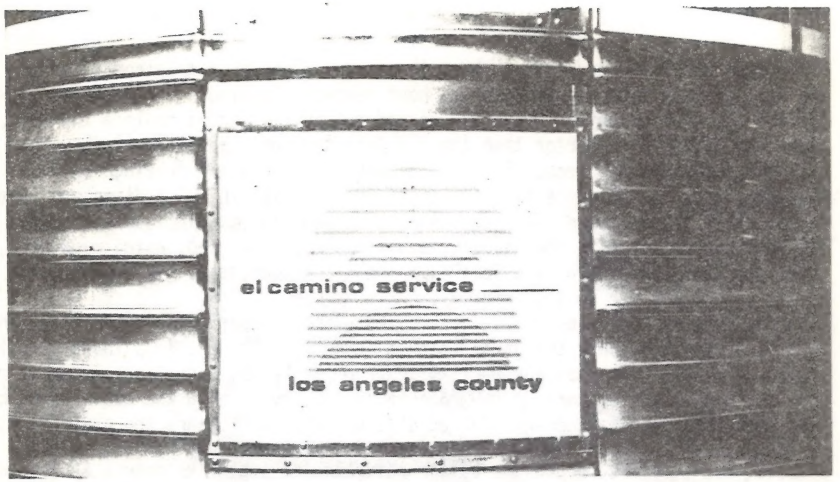
A railfan or two are taking pictures as our train pulls out of the throat tracks. Inside, the ex-CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR beauty has a problem--the heat is on. Shortly someone comes thru the car and changes all the floor valves from "auto" to "off." That helps, but it's a while before things cool down. Still, no freon in the a/c unit, altho it is mechanically in good condition. The blower is on and seems adequate. Up in the dome there are 24 single seats with chrome mounts, colored deep blue. The general motif of the car is bright blue. The parlor seats appear similar to Amtrak's original French Turbos, with the design feature of not reclining, but sliding the cushion forward. The upholstery is a semi-Indian pattern, with orange, white and blue highlights. The walls and ceiling are fully carpeted in light gray. The rear door of the observation car is a bright Amtrak orange, and the roof line is bright blue. The floor carpet is rust-colored. The effect is striking.

I'm the only one in the car, altho soon some of the officials come back and look around, go up into the dome, and leave again. They are representatives of Los Angeles County, Amtrak and Santa Fe, about 10 people. Suddenly, piped-in music blares from the speakers--an old Frank Sinatra 8-track that was left out in the sun too long, with its warps and wows. It gets louder, but is finally adjusted.

Some slow orders are encountered, and we lose 7 minutes to Fullerton. We're off again in a minute and make a 10-second stop at Santa Ana. Time to check out the rest of the train. I walk into "Los Angeles" and find a tannish-brown motif, with yellow-brown upholstery. This car has a 52-seat coach section and a 12-seat lounge with tables, swivel chairs, and button-tufted divans. The coach seats lack center armrests and seat pairs turn easily. The car center is sectioned off with 4 plexiglas dividers hiding four center-facing seats. The walls and ceiling have the same gray carpeting as "San Fernando." There are window shades over the double Lexan panes, but no folddown tables at the seats. The next car is buffet-lounge "Palos Verdes." One end is fitted with 8 tables with standard Amtrak dining car chairs. The floor carpeting is greenish-blue, again with the nice gray carpeted walls and ceiling. On the other side of the center bar are three buffet tables (15" wide) with lounge divans. Across the aisle are three small tables with individual swivel seats. All have black upholstery with yellow cushioning. There is a handicapped restroom at one end of the car. Next up, "Crescenta Valley" has a black and maroon motif. The "Sierra Madre" is a black and orange outfit. This is the ex-Chicago & Eastern Illinois car, and is slightly different in layout. Instead of a 52/12 arrangement, it has 56 coach seats and an 8-seat lounge. The "La Mirada" is a green motif with yellow and tan seats. The first car, "Santa Monica", is predominantly blue with red seats. The colors throughout the train are of high quality, almost iridescent.

On my way back thru the train, I stop and chat with Mr. Don Church, from the Los Angeles County Chief Administration Office. He's representing Supervisor Baxter Ward, who couldn't make it today. Mr. Church says the main reason for this trip is to see how the cars themselves operate and function in simulated service, and to do trouble shooting, and so on. After one car had arrived in Florida for refurbishing, it was discovered that it had dropped a drive shaft. I ask about the coach seats and find they are made in Canada by Delta Industries of Montreal. In fact, these are similar to Canadian National coach seats. Actually, Baxter Ward, when riding the CN, liked them so much, he ordered some for this train.

Mr. Church tells me that stops are planned to be the same ones Amtrak has, altho a couple may be added in L.A. County, like Pico Rivera, as a possibility. The tentative schedule calls for a 5am San Diego departure, with an 8:30am L.A. arrival; leaving L.A. at 5:30pm, getting to San Diego by 8pm. I thank Mr. Church, and note that our time past San Juan Capistrano was 10:42am.



Drumhead on the EL CAMINO's observation car. .Photo by the author.

Along above Oceanside I time our speed at a mile in 37 seconds, or 97mph! South of Oceanside we stop for four minutes due to an unexplained loss of air pressure. Soon we're rocketing right along again. The dome car remained semi-hot, and a couple of coaches lacked freon too but a Hoover Industries representative aboard said that all equipment worked when it left their shop. The dome was particularly well-balanced, he said.

After a 12:12pm arrival in San Diego and a few quick photos, I stayed on the train as it turned on the wye and backed into the station again by 12:45pm. It was interesting to compare the height of the dome-observation car to the low silhouette of the Amfleet train next to it--quite a difference. Train 773 pulled out, and a few minutes later train 772 headed in. Now it was possible to compare the dome car to an F40PH engine. Almost the same height, as it turned out.

Since there were no eating facilities on this run, I grabbed a cheeseburger and a Dr. Pepper at the station's snack bar. After all, this wasn't a press run, but a shakedown cruise. I noticed that some of the officials were bringing their six-packs with them to the lounge car, where the refrigerator was turned on. I rushed to a nearby motel and grabbed three cans of soda pop from a vending machine to tide me over on this hot day.

We left one minute before our scheduled 1:30pm time. The dome car was quite a hothouse now, as the blower was off during the station stop, but I braved it anyway as we twisted thru Little Soledad Canyon near Miramar Hill. A lot of time was spent in the buffet-lounge drinking refreshments and making small talk. The man from Hoover told me a story of the time when Amtrak was looking for a way to hold drink cups at Metroliner seats. So Hoover spent about six weeks and finally came up with a pretty good swing-out affair. But when they presented the idea to Amtrak, they were told a commission had recently gone out to someone else to develop entirely new Metroliner seats!

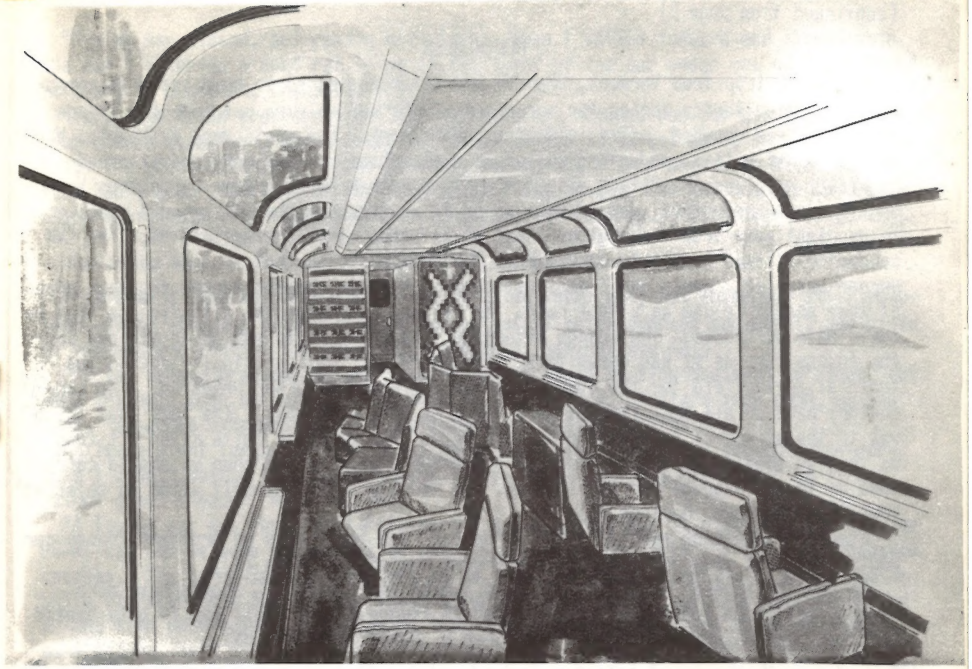
A little north of Del Mar we ground to a stop and the train radio crackled. Trainmen rushed from the cool lounge and out the nearest vestibule. Seems the Southern California Edison Co. was doing some welding near the tracks and didn't see the train until it was right on top of them. Fortunately, everyone got out of the way in time. Kind of shakes one up, tho. We got going again after losing 7 minutes.

Back in the observation car again, I note some negative points: there are no shades on the single-Lexan-paned windows; nor are there any grab rails across the

below-dome aisle windows. What about the former sleeping compartments in this car? The wall between bedrooms A and B has been removed, leaving a blue-painted bulkhead against the gray carpeting. Two divans and two swivel chairs replace the beds. Since the divans are shorter than the old 3-seater sofa bed, there is now room for a little table next to each. The wall between bedroom C and drawingroom D has also been removed. In "C" there is a divan and small table; in "D" a divan and large buffet table face outward where the old shower used to be. Replacing the sofa are two smallish tables with four single swivel chairs. Plenty of extra room here, too. Under the dome, the buffet section has 8 small chromed chairs similar to those up in the dome. The bar is the original.

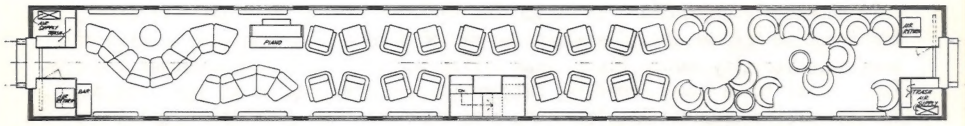
We continue to lose time. Slow orders and stops are part of it, but a 3000-hp SDP40F, I'm told, hasn't the power to make schedule with 7 cars up these almost 2% grades in places. We pass the CALTRAK train opposite the L.A. coach yard, where I spot two Amtrak sister cars to the "San Fernando", for use on the SUNSET LIMITED.

We back into the station and stop at 4:26pm. The dome clears the platform roof by about a foot. Overall, my impression is one of an extremely nice, colorful and pleasing train. It's one of the better refurbishing jobs I've seen. As the only conventional equipment on the San Diego line, "Baxter Ward's Choo-Choo", the EL CAMINO Service, once it gets started, should be a highly rated train.

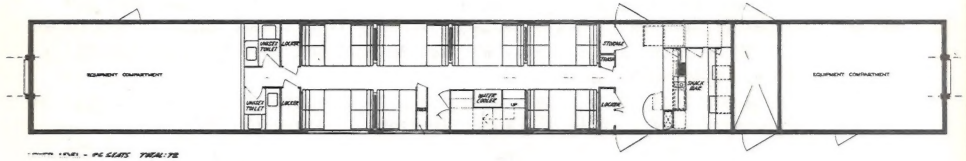


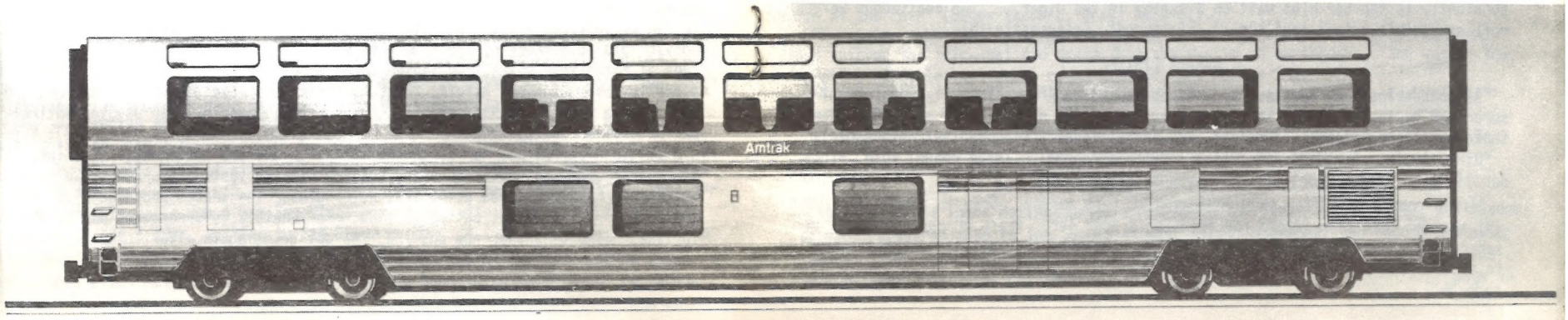
AMTRAK ORDERS BI-LEVEL SIGHTSEER LOUNGES

Amtrak's Board of Directors on Nov 24 approved the purchase of 35 more bi-level long distance passenger cars, bringing the total on order to 284 (see First August issue). The new order consists of 4 diners, 6 coach-baggage cars, and 25 "Sightseer" lounge cars. The adjoining illustrations, released by Amtrak, show the new lounge car's appearance. Amtrak said each car will have 106,218 square inches of window area, 2½ times as much as other bi-level cars have. Side windows on upper and lower levels will be 39 inches high (24 on other bi-levels), and curved windows that run into the roof line will be 27 inches deep. Plans are for 46 lounge seats, including 18 apparently swiveling armchairs, on the upper level, and 26 seats and a food service section on the lower. The curved upper windows are slightly different from those of the ex-Santa Fe hi-level lounges, judging from illustrations; the newer ones seem to cut further into the roof and go down the car side a shorter distance, while the vertical windows appear to be taller (compare illustration in 1st August issue).



UPPER LEVEL - 46 SEATS





(continued from page 8)

MONTREALER

"On return trip from Vermont, the CVR Conductor neglected to hold seats as per a Transportation Advice Notice for our group of 15, and we were put into the lounge car, which was crowded, noisy, and practically dark. Few seats were available. When we checked with this conductor, he became quite abusive. The B&M conductor had a 'couldn't care less' attitude also. A call to Amtrak headquarters by me from Vermont was non-productive, and we were asked if we expected them to bring a coach up to us right away from Washington. Most of us stood until Springfield MA. The CVR conductor allowed people to occupy more than one seat, so that in some cases one person occupied 2 seats and 2 persons occupied 4 seats, having turned the seat ahead of them around to use as a foot rest. He refused to change the situation so that we could have our seats. The lounge attendant told us we could not bring pillows into the lounge car, as it was unsanitary. The extra car that was finally put on the train at Springfield for the overflow crowd was dark, cold and unheated. The conductors made us all feel that we were lucky to even have this. The fact that this was in the middle of winter sure did not help. The agent at White River Jct told us that we should put our own tags on our group's baggage and then we should carry them up to the baggage car for loading. He finally did it himself after we objected" (Dr. Allan H. Toub, Madison NJ).

"Expected something special with Le Pub car, but found only an ordinary lounge car undistinguished from any other train" (Perry Huntoon, Houston TX).

"No heat in sleeper on northbound trip. Penn Station in NYC should have more heated facilities for winter storms. Amtrak lounge is too small and is only heated facility with standing room only" (Stephen E. Morse, Marshall MN).

INTER-AMERICAN

"A thoroughly enjoyable trip (which the ratings unfortunately don't reflect). The bus transfer between the SP station and the MP tracks in San Antonio is kind of a hassle (especially during Fiesta week traffic) and MP & T&P's 60mph speed limit in Texas makes for a lousy schedule, but service was good, equipment fine, and there was interesting railroading to watch. The train was well-patronized, but there were enough cars to keep it from becoming overcrowded" (Stephen Miller, Carlsbad CA).

"Service and personnel absolutely topnotch. Service attendant Linda Davis and waiter Johnson (?) were really outstanding. Scenery in Missouri and Arkansas rates a dome. Station services at St. Louis and San Antonio are next to non-existent" (Leo Rosenblum, Yellow Springs OH).

"Service here was best of all, but equipment old, schedule slow, track rough. Dining car crew and steward excellent" (Robert Bedford, Minneapolis MN).

"Diner-lounge service was very friendly, but was chaotic, thanks to one of the waiters not showing for the trip. The steward had to handle at least 16 persons constantly in the bar plus wait on 3 tables in the diner... The continuous welded rail makes this trip a joy" (Dr. J. Eigenbrodt, Greencastle IN).

PANAMA LIMITED

"After hearing many negative reports about the PANAMA's diner, I was pleasantly surprised by the excellent service. Crew, under the direction of steward C. Bartholomew, was courteous, efficient, and professional" (C.A. Rudisel, Minnesota).

"Dirty train. Arrogant and sullen service personnel. Track rough. Old, high-density cars used. Poor!" (R. G. Raymund, Akron OH).

"Train generally better than indicated in last survey. Crew is almost all young, yet most of them seem interested in doing a good job. Track on south end of run surprisingly good, with much 80mph running. Some of the equipment leaves something to be desired" (Jeff Pletcher, Lafayette LA).

"Dining car closed, but reason not given. When I walked forward and looked into the car I observed a dead rat lying on the floor of the car under one of the tables" (Richard W. Eggebeen, Champaign IL).

"Very good train crew and excellent Amtrak crew. Lounge obs car bad ordered a half hour before departure, and a table in the diner had to be set aside for lounge service. The young attendants liked talking, and made the trip enjoyable even with the very bad track. Addition of the dome sleeper was great. The Red Snapper in Creole Sauce was great--will recommend this to anyone..." (Andrew J. Bianchi, Chicago IL).

NATIONAL LIMITED

"Has come a long way from its low point a few years ago, but there are still problems--dirty windows, better than before but still below average equipment, and hints of temperature control failures" (David Riddle, Springfield MO).

"Porter seemed preoccupied and steward seemed bored by slow business in diner, but very friendly when he put down the book he was reading. Waiters very good, as was food. Schedule extremely slow" (Leo Rosenblum, Yellow Springs OH).

"A few violent lurches in the night notwithstanding, the track seemed fair--perhaps I didn't notice the crawling pace in my sleep--and from Pittsburgh on it was rather good" (Reader, New York NY).

"A lounge car was running NY-Pittsburgh, so when they cut it off, they cut off our DC-KC car and we were routed out of near sleep and herded into the two other crowded coaches. The diner-lounges have got to go. Waited until after 7pm to be seated in spite of relatively few eating (fewer after several gave up and some who had waited a long time were told by the steward that they wouldn't have time to enjoy their meal before their stop). Track is getting better; we arrived in St. Louis 35mins early. Conductor gave interesting talk about the sights" (J. Hursh, Warrensburg MO).

BROADWAY LIMITED

"Still a rolling junk yard. AC is either not working or too cold. We had a mechanic on the train who was kept very busy. Despite longer schedule, we were 30 mins late to New York" (Joseph Perilongo, Dekalb IL).

"Has the most courteous and efficient dining car personnel I have seen on the entire Amtrak system" (Jeff Cole, Carpinteria CA).

"Remains one of the worst trains I've ridden... Even with the unbearably padded schedule, we were 1½hrs late to NY in large part due to sitting in stations for twice the allotted time" (David Ellison, Chicago IL).

"A great train; I don't understand low ratings from others" (Reader, Austin TX).

"Ash tray broken, no fresh air, no heat, ceiling light broken; then moved to another room, and could not turn heat off. Later had no heat at all! Rubber mattress, rubber pillow--too hot" (William Stroh III, Short Hills NJ).

"Cars 'Wauwasee' and 'Metcalf' give this train some class. If only they could run at the rear" (Danny Vaccaro, Great Neck NY).

"My sister, who usually flies tho scared to do so, accompanied me to Ft. Wayne and enjoyed the trip--but did dream that she was in an earthquake. She was in the Hawaii earthquake last year" (John Schmidt, Des Moines IA).

"Train suffers from uneven quality among all crew members" (James C. Pakala, Hatfield PA).

"The only train I know of that is late before it ever leaves the station to begin its run" (R. G. Raymund, Akron OH).

Results of RTN's Third Rating Survey appeared in the First August issue, and reader comments appeared also in the Second August, First September, and Second September issues. RTN is currently accepting ratings in its fourth survey, covering trips made between July 1 and December 31, 1976.

Urban-Suburban Transit

THE CLEVELAND-YOUNGSTOWN commuter train, now being run by ConRail, will be discontinued after Jan 14 unless some last-ditch funding effort is found. ConRail posted discontinuance notices Nov 15, reports OARP, after deciding not to continue subsidies beyond its current funding. The Ohio Rail Transportation Authority, created by the state legislature but reportedly increasingly under the influence of the non-rail-oriented state DOT, decided this month not to subsidize the run. ORTA was also opposed to seeking UMTA funding, which would amount to 100% until Mar 31 and 90% thereafter. Ohio's constitution prohibits direct subsidies to private enterprise. ORTA currently handles no passenger trains, but is making a one-year study of them.

AN ARSON FIRE on a BART train Nov 17 caused $100,000 damage to a cab-unit car near Oakland's 19th St. station. The Oakland Fire Dept. extinguished the blaze, in a seat, without injuries. BART is offering a promotional "BART Get-Away Kit" of GO BART tote bag, route map and two tickets worth $1 each, for a limited time for $5 (postmarked before Dec 9). Write: BART, Box 9056, Sunnyvale CA 94086.

SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE for the Transportation Disadvantaged will be held Dec 13-15 at Sheraton National Hotel, Washington DC. Info from Cape May County DOT, c/o Cape May County Airport, Rio Grande NJ 08242.

ABOUT ONE DOZEN production models of the LRV are now in Boston, but it is doubtful that more than one or two will see revenue service this year. The two test cars were rejected by the MBTA consulting engineers, Kaiser Engineers, for a number of reasons. If one is ready in December it will be put into service quietly on an abbreviated shuttle service. Boston is hesitant to give much publicity to a still-yet problem-riddled vehicle. (Report from Pete Roehm.)

MRS. HANS KLUSSMAN, tireless leader of citizens groups to save San Francisco's cable cars since 1946, is now working on a plan to encourage political leaders to have the cable car system removed from the S.F. Muni Railway and operated by an independent district with its own board of trustees. Mrs. K feels that Muni management ignores cable car problems and prefers to concentrate on bus operations.

INDUSTRY SOURCES INDICATE that San Francisco cannot expect delivery of the Boeing LRV streetcars now on order until 1978. The city hall's legal establishment is becoming more aware of the situation and has quietly informed Boeing that any car that does not work will be returned to Boeing and will not be paid for. S.F. officials reportedly want as many cars as possible to go to Boston first, to reduce chances of "lemons" being delivered to the Bay City.

TRANSIT NEWS BRIEFS: Seattle bus fares jump from 20¢ to 30¢ on Jan 1; 10¢ senior citizen rates remain unchanged... City of Pittsburgh was hit by a transit strike on Dec 1... Transit workers in Columbus OH ended a 6-day strike Nov 21... The wildcat strike by Milwaukee bus drivers Nov 11 ended after lasting 11 hours... A standard model automobile costs 31.5¢ per mile to operate, figures Hertz Corp., while a mid-size model costs 28.1¢ and a subcompact 21.4¢, these figures about 3.3% higher than in 1975... Duke University researchers have found that car driving is more boring to the more highly educated person; the person with a master's degree is 28 times more likely to fall asleep at the wheel than an 8th-grade educated person--or maybe he's just more fatigued from all that studying...

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"If it had derailed in front of the Ritz Hotel, things would have been different. But that wasn't the case... Considering all the problems, I think we did well."

--Amtrak spokesman responding to reporter's question about passenger complaints of poor quality of free breakfast given them in a Memphis cafe after the Nov 25 derailment of the PANAMA LIMITED.

Mixed Train of Thoughts

THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY was given ICC permission to discontinue its PIEDMONT effective Nov 23. The railroad told the ICC it averaged about 500 passengers per month in each direction on its Washington DC to Charlotte NC route..... FARES WILL RISE on many Amtrak Eastern routes Dec 15, by an average of 3.5%, and they will go up 3% on Western routes Feb 1. They are the first increases since last Jun 15, when Amtrak raised coach fares 5%, and are said to be required to keep up with inflation.....

* * *

WE FINALLY ACQUIRED a copy of the Oct 31 Amtrak systemwide timetable (marked by blue-violet and orange cover). There are some interesting but subtle changes in format. For the first time, the airline-style system map is gone, replaced by one on which the lines wiggle, like they do in reality. There are also many more cities shown on the map, and Canadian and Mexican connections are indicated. However, it's not the same as the map we saw at Amtrak headquarters (see First April issue). Non-Amtrak rail schedules are not all lumped in the back pages, but are geographically integrated with the Amtrak schedules. And of course kilometers are shown, as well as miles, in timetables. We learn that our favorite Amtrak train, the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, runs 3839 kilometers between Oakland and Chicago. The Northeast Corridor is 734 kilometers long. An entire page is devoted to bus connections north of Boston, and another entire page to an ad for this service that Amtrak seems to be doing so much more to promote than the bus lines are. This Form A timetable was printed in an edition of 250,000..... AMTRAK RIDERSHIP FIGURES for September are out, and they show a massive increase of 28% in long distance ridership over Sept 1975. Short distance ridership rose 8%, and systemwide the increase over 1975 was 12%. The COAST STARLIGHT maintained its position of most heavily-ridden train easily with a total of 37,620 riders; that was a 27% increase over Sept 1975 STARLIGHT ridership...

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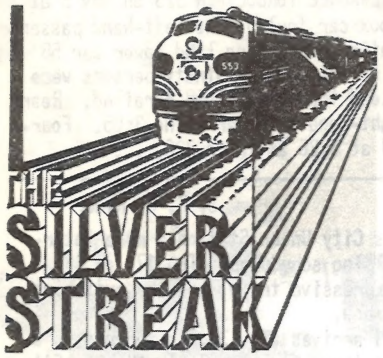
CANADIAN RTN READER rode the "Shoppers Special" 7-car Amfleet PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL run to Seattle on Nov 11, and reported that with two Amcafe cars working, the large crowd was handled very smoothly and passengers seemed to enjoy themselves. Clearly more Amfleet cars are needed in the Northwest, however, since the rider returned from Portland at 5:05pm on Nov 12 and found only a 2-car MOUNT RAINIER, which had standees from Centralia north. The crew said that most Amfleet cars had been held for use on the P.I. that day, and seemed angry that their train had been "stabbed" for the equipment..... LOCAL RAILROAD STATION improvement is being encouraged by Amtrak, who has developed a program of matching funds for smaller communities that want to upgrade their stations. Amtrak has committed $1 million to the program in this fiscal year, and application must be made by next June 1. Said Paul Reistrup, "up until now, Amtrak's station projects have been, for the most part, questions of immediate necessity. Scarce funds went to fix or replace very costly or deteriorated stations in larger cities. By opening station rehabilitation to local participation, we can encourage Amtrak communities to get involved in passenger service. We want them to have a real stake in our future success." Amtrak's portion of rehab funding will be limited to $50,000 or 60% of the total cost, whichever is less. Amtrak has sent out letters to Mayors of on-line towns explaining the program; however, it emphasized that local orgnizations, public or private, are encouraged to participate. Write: Amtrak, Dept of State & Local Affairs, 955 L'Enfant Plaza North, S.W., Washington DC 20024..... THE THANKSGIVING CROWD on the SAN DIEGANS was so large that 150 people were left behind at L.A. Union Station that morning and had to seek refunds. About 400 people, including standees, were on the early train out of L.A..... A MESSY AFRICAN train wreck took the lives of 13 and injured 40, as the Mombasa-Nairobi express on Nov 29 ran off a flood-damaged bridge directly into swirling flood waters. At first it was believed that hundreds had perished in submerged coaches.....

REPORTS ARE COMING to us that the new Canadian LRC passenger coach is suffering from a number of major problems which have developed during the testing period the last several months. One drawback has been development of structural problems with the lightweight aluminum members of which the car is constructed..... AMTRAK'S NEW MAGAZINE, "All Aboard," for on-train passengers, which starts up in December, can be obtained by subscription ($6 per year) from Caldwell Communications inc., 747 Third Avenue, New York NY 10017..... UNION STATION ARCADE in Columbus OH has been demolished, reports OARP. It could not be saved due to excessive corrosion. The present Amtrak station will be torn down in Jan or Feb, when the new Swan Street station is ready..... GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY will construct 12-story high windmills as an experiment in wind generation of electric power. A government contract to build the giant windmills has been let to GE, and two construction sites will be selected next year..... THE SECOND GENERATION Metroliner car, the Metroliner II, may be a European-designed car, reports the NY Times. Amtrak listed the cars as part of its wants under its new 5-year plan (see last issue). The corporation also plans to overhaul existing Metroliners in the next few years. The Times also said that there are plans to build Amsleepers and Amfleet diners for conventional trains in the East, altho the summary of the 5-year plan we saw referred only to conventional cars and not Amfleet cars. We have not yet received our copy of the complete 5-year plan, but expect to have it to report on by next issue.....

* * *

AUTO-TRAIN CORPORATION is still working on its Mexican service, reports the NY Times. The corporation plans to run an Auto-Train from Laredo TX to Queretara, near Mexico City, an 800-mile run. The paper says Auto-Train is also talking about Chicago-Denver and "services between a variety of points" in conjunction with Amtrak..... SPEAKING OF MEXICAN train riding, the peso has been devalued once more, making Mexican fares even lower for Americans. Reader Jim Tatum, just back from there, tells RTN that the Ferrocarril del Pacifico has purchased a 2-car FIAT autovia due to go into service Nov 20 (a few days ago), probably nonstop from Nogales to Guaymas. It went thru Benjamin Hill southbound on Nov 11, presumably on a test run, painted in a very striking blue and white. Mr. Tatum wants to advise readers that the only way to take advantage of the peso devaluation is to convert dollars to pesos immediately after crossing into Mexico; but shop around a bit by going to a couple of banks and a money exchange house and find the best rate. Readers going by rail should by all means pay their fares in pesos, since the railroads are following the general pattern of businesses and giving as low a rate of pesos to dollars as possible. While one may get 23 or 24 pesos per dollar at a bank, the railroad will give only 19 or 20..... DOT SECRETARY COLEMAN wants a "classy transition" to the new administration, says the NY Times, and reportedly plans to run for Governor of Pennsylvania. The Times interviewer asked him what pitfalls his job holds, and he at once lit into Amtrak again: "The next Secretary will have to take a close look (at Amtrak) or find himself spending more than $1 billion a year with less than half of one percent of the people wanting to take intercity train trips." At least he's consistent to the end..... PEAK PASSENGER LOADS of this holiday season, Amtrak says, will occur on the four days before Dec 24 and the four days beginning Jan 1. Paul Reistrup said that "many, many passengers may be traveling on our trains for the first time (this holiday season)" and he urged employees to welcome them aboard with "the little bit extra in courtesy and dedication that makes all the difference"..... AMTRAK'S RAIL/SAIL programs from Florida ports have been announced once more this year. Inclusive prices for the 1976-77 season start at $444 from New York. A brochure is available from Amtrak Sales, 1 Penn Plaza, Dept. BT, New York NY 10001. On Dec 15 Amtrak's Florida service starts its annual winter season, with three separate trains from New York, and most of the schedule times changed. The new times are listed in the current Oct 31 timetable.....

"THE SILVER STREAK" is a new movie previewed in New York last week, which should be around the rest of the country soon (see reproduction of advertisement at left).



It's a comedy-thriller starring Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor ("A shy, retiring writer, played by Gene Wilder, takes a 3-day train ride to the East, seeking rest and relaxation, but before the journey is ended he has become involved in a series of mysterious adventures and misadventures both on and off the train..."). Altho the ad here shows a Rio Grande train, reader Al Crossley tells us that CP Rail's CANADIAN was used as the SILVER STREAK (but look for the Amtrak route map in the diner). Action includes a runaway train. Paul Rayton tells us of two other recent movies with railroad themes, which may or may not be widely available: "Death Journey" and "Train Ride to Hollywood"..... RECOMMENDED BY DOCTORS: the S.W. RR Historical society reports that an obstetrician endorsed plans for rail travel by a member and his pregnant wife because of: greater mobility aboard the train, lack of confinement, absence of altitude and pressure changes, and the generally more relaxed atmosphere of rail travel.....

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A NEW STATION will be built for Minneapolis/St. Paul, Amtrak annnounced late this month. Amtrak's Board approved leasing for 20 years from the St. Paul Port Authority a new 15,720-square foot station to be built between Pierce Butler Road and University Ave. The location is 3 blocks from I-94 freeway, at the approximate geographic center of the Twin City metropolitan area. Construction will start in the spring and will take one year. Total construction cost will be about $4.7 million. The Port Authority will finance construction and will donate the land, while Amtrak will lease the building and will own the structure at the end of 20 years. Amtrak said that the current station, the old BN station on Hennepin Ave. in Minneapolis, is in need of expensive repair, is poorly located and is inconvenient for passengers and operating personnel. Amtrak says its station costs will be cut 14% annually with the new building..... THE CITY OF Del Mar, CA has approved a $10,000 study on a possible new location for its train station. The County fairgrounds is a widely-mentioned possible relocation point..... SAN DIEGAN RIDERS can transport their bicycle from train to Coronado Island via the Route 9 bus at the Amtrak station, which carries a bicycle rack. With the Coronado ferries gone, the bridge to the island is for autos only, thus the need for the bike-bus.....

* * *

AMTRAK'S BI-LEVEL CAR work at Pullman-Standard is moving along, with four cars in early stages of construction. No interior work has been done on them yet. There are mockups of parts of a kitchen-galley, sleeper and a coach. A press showing of the cars is expected in Jan or Feb..... NEW YORK STATE Transportation Commissioner Raymond Schuler announced Nov 23 that a $33 million contract for track and signal improvement work between Poughkeepsie and the Capitol District should be executed in December--the first phase of improvements in the Empire Corridor.....

NEW LONDON, CT station had its first concession, a newsstand, opened on Nov 15, with a Hertz Rentacar booth to follow soon. A restaurant was to open by Jan 1, but it now appears to be set for next spring..... OCTOBER RIDERSHIP INCREASES in October of 47.3% (over Oct 1975) were reported for the Seattle-Portland trains, while the PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL increased 53% in the same period. Amfleet equipment and the low roundtrip fares and convenience of the Kingdome stadium to the Seattle Amtrak station were believed to contribute to the ridership increases..... THE TRAIN WHISTLES of Amtrak and BN are different--BN's are shriller and annoying, according to an Edmonds WA man who writes the Seattle Times to inquire why. The Times said

the BN's standard 3-chime horn is pitched at frequencies of 311, 370 and 480 Hz. Amtrak's are in the same general range, said a BN man, and he could give no explanation for a different effect from them..... MILWAUKEE TURBOLINER 323 on Nov 5 at 2:30pm, traveling at 10mph, struck a derailed box car fouling the left-hand passenger main line ½-mile south of the Milwaukee station, derailing lead power car 58 (Turboclub) and damaging the left front corner of this unit. Ninety persons were aboard; one crewman reported minor injuries. Lead truck of car 58 derailed. Rear 4 cars were uncoupled and run into depot on right-hand main, arriving 3:05. Four-car train was unloaded, inspected, and departed at 3:26 as train 326.....

THE AMTRAK KANSAS CITY BALLET by K. C. Ryder

Amtrak's drive to reduce costs is making Kansas City Union Station a more interesting place to watch trains even if it isn't helping schedules. The 17- or 18-car combined SOUTHWEST LIMITED/LONE STAR is an impressive train, and the switching needed to split or combine the two is not a bad show.

The action usually begins as 5:40pm when no. 31 arrives with 3 cars for nos. 3 & 15, a 10/6 sleeper and 2 mail-storage cars. Some time after midnight a Kansas City Terminal switch crew cuts out the 3 westbound cars and spots the 10/6 at the platform. The crew turns and washes the rest of 31's train and they or another crew take 31's road engine to the KCT roundhouse for servicing and turning.

Waiting on a station track are two SDP40F's which came up on 16 that morning and have been laying over at KCUS during the day. SDPs in the Santa Fe pool work Barstow-Chicago-Houston-KC-LA-Barstow, a cycle that takes a full week. A third unit works thru on 3 & 4 LA-Chicago and back.

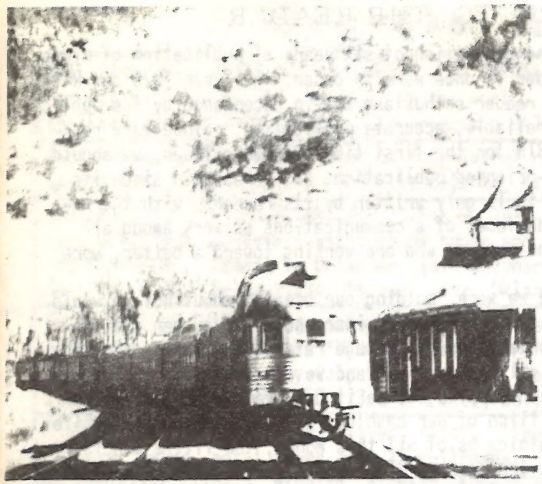
No. 3-15 arrives sometime before the scheduled 1:15am most nights, 30 minutes of padding having been added to the Chicago-KC schedule over 15's old time (45 minutes over no. 3's). The road engine cuts off and a second KCT switch crew sets 15's working baggage onto an adjacent track. (At first this was all the work this crew did, but lately they have been setting the car from 31 on the front end of 3 after removing the Houston baggage.) The first switcher, holding the thru sleeper, the NY-LA mail car (at first) and the NY-Dallas mail car, picks up the rear portion of the train and sets the rest of 15, from the last two hi-levels back to the 48-seat coach, onto the adjacent track. It then couples the first class section of 3 back to 3's chair cars and puts 15's NY mail car on the rear. In the meantime, the road engine sets the third (thru) unit onto the front of 3 and moves over to couple onto 15. The layover units move onto 3. The whole thing takes almost the full 45 minutes alloted (no. 3 formerly spent 10 minutes in KC, no. 15 spent 15). The operation isn't particularly efficient, especially with two and sometimes three yard crews involved. (The road engine, of course, could set the one baggage car over to 15's track, but union rules don't allow that.) It adds 80 minutes to the SOUTHWEST LIMITED's schedule, with no apparent gain in service, and an hour to the LONE STAR's.

More importantly, it takes the LONE STAR off a successful early-into-Chicago schedule which has seen patronage blossom. And it requires passengers to sit--or be shuffled around--under KCUS for up to an hour before the 2am (no. 3) and 2:15am (no. 15) departures.

The savings: a day's pay for 4 Santa Fe train crews, operating costs of running one engine KC-Chi-KC (3 instead of 4 make that roundtrip but savings are offset by running 3 units KC-La Junta on 3 & 4) and the wages of the first class diner crew on 3 & 4 (which probably would have been cut anyway). First reports indicate a fairly sharp drop in ticket sales at KC, especially for 15 & 16. Switching costs and revenue loss must eat up a fair portion of the savings, tho probably not all.

The trains reportedly will run in sections (as no. 15 & 16 and extras--Santa Fe abolished formal sections a few years back) during holiday periods. It remains to be seen, tho, if this will be done, or done as much as demand would warrant, or if a lot of people will be left standing on the platform.

It's a good show, tho.



The eastbound RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR at Glenwood Springs, Colorado, in October, a few weeks before removal of its observation car "Silver Sky" for refurbishing and conversion of four Pullman rooms to open lounge space. While the observation is off the train, Rio Grande's only ex-Cable Car dome-dorm-lounge car "Silver Shop" will pinch-hit. The car has subbed previously when "Sky" or diner "Silver Banquet" were sidelined. In the scene pictured, repairs are going on to the roof of the Glenwood Springs station. Photo by Glenn Lee.

THANKSGIVING IN THE LOWER CORRIDOR by Ken Maylath

In the past RTN, except last year, has surveyed Amtrak ridership on the heavy Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend (Nov 28 this year). This time I traveled to Washington on the CHESAPEAKE, which proved to be the most late-running train of the day--55mins late into DC, with 13 loaded Amfleet cars. Here's a summary of what I saw in DC:

Metroliner operations ranged from on time to 15 late, and were sold out. Biggest logistical problem at DC was a narrow passageway from the waiting room thru an area under construction. This got crowded when two or more trains were loading or unloading. The area isn't heated either, but the day was unseasonably warm, with some rain.

I checked as many as I could of about 30 train movements in a 5-hr period. A modest crowd of450 boarded the northbound MERCHANTS LTD, which left 10 late. The southbound COLONIAL discharged over 600, 30 behind. The MINUTE MAN ran in 3 sections--from Boston, NY, and Philadelphia. They ranged from on time to 15 late, and carried a total of at least 1500. The RILEY had a good crowd--about 250. The MONTREALER consisted of an advance section of conventional cars to NY plus the Montreal portion--nearly 1000 boarding in all. The BLUE RIDGE from Martinsburg had problems and got in just over an hour late. An advance section of the PALMETTO was run, with conventional cars, and had several hundred aboard shortly before departure. The regular section arrived from the south 30 late, with many detraining. Two sections of the SOUTHERN CRESCENT rolled in--one from Boston on time and one from NY 20 down. Another 1500 detrained. Altho permission to discontinue the PIEDMONT was received by the Southern just before Thanksgiving, the railroad continued it as a "special" thru the holiday weekend. The last run rolled in on time. The METEOR and CHAMPION ran as separate sections--proof enough of heavy business. I wasn't around for the southbound SENATOR's arrival nor the STATESMAN's, but each had NY and Boston sections.

My own return to Baltimore was on another troubled train. The COLONIAL from the south detrained 100 and then changed its loading to the upper level. Switching and adding cars plus an engine problem saw it leaving a half hour late. About 400 boarded the 14 Amfleet cars.

Compared to 2 years ago, there were fewer long delays, bigger crowds, less standing.

As we go to press, news of SP's commute line (see article last issue): PENTAP is expected to announce Dec 3 the final recommendation of its consultant for the line's future--a "major upgrading" at a cost of $105.5 million, including renovating rolling stock, conversion to push-pull operation by 1982, and CTC introduction. A special shuttle bus loop would carry riders from 4th & Townsend to San Francisco's central business district.

A REPORT TO THE READER

On the occasion of the completion of six years of publication of RTN, a report to the reader is once more in order. The year 1976 saw RTN continue to grow in reader enthusiasm and in acceptance by the public as an influential, reliable, accurate publication. Since many readers will be seeing RTN for the first time with this issue, we should point out that RTN is a consumer-oriented publication, as it has been since its inception in December 1970. RTN is largely written by its readers, with the result, hopefully, that it forms one facet of a communications network among all those people, both in the U.S. and abroad, who are working toward a better, more humanized transportation system.

In our report last year we said we were "holding our breath" about how we would weather the Postal Service's 30% first class rate increase. As you can see, we have survived, but this unprecedented leap in postage rates hit us hard. Now the Postal Service says it has a $15 million surplus, and we can only say that it has no business garnering a $15 million surplus, since it has overcharged Americans for its services and taken $15 million of our cash out of circulation. And while the massive Postal Service is draining us of all this money, the little man is struggling to make ends meet. In the case of RTN, we are little, and postage charges are our single biggest expense. To have them jump 30% overnight was difficult, to say the least.

The main effect of the tight budgeting we had to do was that our advertising budget was cut severely. This was unfortunate, since it resulted in a levelling off of RTN's growth in subscribership during 1976. All the extra money we had to throw into the Postal Service's hoppers of surplus cash was taken away from money we should have spent to advertise RTN and increase its circulation. We are now planning a big assault on this problem in an attempt to regain lost ground. As a part of that effort, we would be pleased to hear from officers of any rail organizations who would be willing to participate in plans to distribute RTN to their membership as a way of introducing the magazine to them.

Our switch to doing our own printing in 1975 proved to be a wise one. It seems probable that RTN could not have financially survived the postage rate increase without the economies of running our own printing and binding facility. We are most grateful to our readers for their patience in enduring the spotty printing results that came out of our printing facility for so long. In the last few weeks we made another breakthrough in tuning our press to produce really dark black printing without overinking and smudging. To judge the quality of our printing, look at the last 3 issues--not at our printing quality of a year or a few months ago. Our quality should now never drop below that of this current issue, and if anything, should exceed it as we continue to fine-tune our operation and gain more experience. (One of our recent discoveries proved to be incredibly simple--we found a better brand of ink!)

A few readers have wondered whether full-color printing isn't too costly, and whether the money couldn't better be used differently. The answer is that color printing done commercially is very costly, but that we can do it cheaply since we do all the work ourselves. Readers served as Guinea pigs for our first crude efforts at this, and we think you'll agree as you examine our current cover that we've made strides in color printing. We think it's very useful to be able to produce full-color pictures where the color conveys information that can be given in no other way.

As we pointed out earlier, we have gradually fallen 2 issues behind in publication in 1976, a result of repeated staff illnesses earlier this year. It also means we have lost money because we are consequently a month behind in billing renewals of subscriptions. Most seriously, we are far behind in our original schedule for producing our first Rail Travel Yearbook. We are now announcing that the Yearbook will be published on December 30. We are most grateful for the continued patience of Yearbook purchasers.

Thank you for a good year--but we want to save our holiday greetings for our big holiday issue coming up next time. -J.R.

Express Ads

RAIL FANS ONLY! It's easy to secure your AMTRAK & CN reservations and tickets (or USA Rail Pass)--from anywhere in the world. Tickets by mail from GREAT WESTERN TOURS, 639 Market St., San Francisco 94105, or call (415) 398-2994.

Avoid disappointment--Make your holiday Amtrak reservations NOW thru the rail specialists, Let's Travel, 3780 Elizabeth St, Riverside CA 92506. 714-787-8350.

GUATEMALA RAILFAN FUN-TRAIN--Jan 21-Feb 6, 1977--Narrow Gauge steam special train thru GUATEMALA mountains--visit round house and yards. Private cars SOONERLAND and MISTLETOE. Starts in Oklahoma (join anywhere). Write Midwest Travel Service, 2936-R Bella Vista, Midwest City, Oklahoma, 73110--Phone 732-0566.

UNION PACIFIC CHINA: Large selection platters, egg cups, salad bowls, etc. 16 different pieces available "Winged Streamliner," "Desert Flower," "Blue & Gold"; Dining car linens and crystal; Miscellaneous items. SSAE for complete price list. THE PRIVATE CAR, LTD., 3rd & A Sts., Belleville, Ill. 62220.

DINING CAR DISHES, glasses, silver, cloth. Timetables, guides, Pullman, stationery, rules, metal items from 25 railroads. Long stamped envelope for list. J. McClellan, 1752 S. Wichita, Wichita, Kan. 67213. (Will buy large and small railroad collections.)

TIMETABLE GRAB BAG BARGAINS. $10 brings you $20 worth of good material back to even the 50's. Also fantastic clear plastic slip covers for public TTs only $7.25 per 100 postpaid. We also buy all timetable collections. Tom Coval, 21 E. Robin Road, Holland PA 18966.

STEAM SAFARI OF SOUTH AFRICA. Three-week tour by minibus May, 1977. Land cost approximately $425.00 plus airfare. Limited to 12 persons. For further information: Leroy Y. Beaujon, 11073 Bel Aire Court, Cupertino, California 95014.

RTN ADVERTISING RATES: Express Ads $1 per line of 80 spaces. Display ads $25 per half-page (maximum size--4x5 inches); $12.50 per quarter page. Write to: Message Media, Ad Dept., Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Thank you!

In San Clemente by Richard Nixon, President, 10-30-70:

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